

Survey shows consumer online vigilance waning

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SEATTLE – This seems counterintuitive, but Americans are actually becoming less vigilant about how they live their digital lives.

The underground market for stolen consumer data is as hot as ever. Your name, mailing address, phone number and e-mail addresses are valuable commodities for phishing scams and even more invasive forms of identity theft.

Yet many people don't grasp this. Microsoft in 2011 began something call the [The Microsoft Computing Safety Index](#), a scoring system that designates 20 best practices.

While people are not necessarily engaging in overt risky behaviors, they are become more remiss about taking simple steps to make themselves less of a target of cybercriminals, says Jacqueline Beauchere, Microsoft's Director of Trustworthy Computing.

Reversing this trend won't come easy. "At the end of the day, we're talking about behavioral change – and that can be very difficult," Beauchere says. "We need to march people along a continuum – from raising awareness, to adjusting their attitudes, changing their beliefs, and ultimately altering their behavior. It starts with awareness and education."

Beauchere advises you to:

- **Protect your computer and your accounts.** This includes keeping all software (including your web browser and spam filters) current with security updates and enabling automatic updating where possible; installing legitimate antivirus and antispyware software; always keeping your firewall on, and not using the same password everywhere.-
- **Install a modern operating system.** Having the latest Internet search browser with advanced security protections is a great first line of defense against malware.
- **Think before you click links or open documents.** Even if you think you know the sender, first confirm the message is genuine.
- **Look for signs that a webpage is secure and legitimate.** Check for encryption, such as a web address with https ("s" stands for secure) and a closed padlock.
- **Share your primary email only with people and organizations you know.** This will cut down spam. Do not list your email address publicly, and only friend people you've met in person. Also, set your spam email filter to Standard or High.